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# How effective is social media as the main marketing tool for small and medium-sized enterprises?

Case: WeLoveSpain

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<p>The thesis will study the effectiveness of social media marketing as the main marketing tool for an SME. Social media has shown significant growth in popularity lately, both in the public and personal use as well as in the business world. Companies are acknowledging the potential of social media and realizing slowly that it seems that it will not be a passing trend. For an SME this could potentially mean good news. The general idea is that social media marketing could potentially be fairly inexpensive and with the growing number of social media users it seems like a sure bet. The research will try to find out that is that true. With a variety of different methods and a vast number of sources the thesis will try to find answers about the true effectiveness of social media marketing.</p> <p>The current landscape of social media will be explored in order to demonstrate accurately the popularity, significance and size. The reader will gain a good overview of what benefits social media marketing as the main marketing tool can give to an SME. The benefits are thoroughly explored and comparisons with marketing theory, articles and interview results will be done. The general support for the thesis will come from interview done with key members of the case company, which questions were carefully thought out in a manner that would potentially support the research findings the most. This will grant a more truthful image of the current landscape and benefits of social media marketing.</p> <p>The more challenging aspects of social media marketing will be tackled by using a large amount of marketing theory books combined with articles written by professionals. Introducing the further information gained through the interviews. The reader will get to know the basics behind social media marketing and how it is potentially profitable. In addition to this the reader will be introduced to the ways this profitability can be calculated and analysed. Furthermore the future of social media is very important, because many companies are thinking of investing in social media marketing it is vital to present a clear picture of the future.</p> <p>The effectiveness of social media marketing for an SME is an important question that needs research and clear results. The case company will offer a realistic view of their marketing that can be compared with the acquired research findings. Combining the two will help formulate a picture of the effectiveness of social media marketing as the main marketing tool for an SME.</p>	
Keywords	Social media marketing, travel industry, SME

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## **Glossary**

SME = Small and medium sized enterprise

WLS = WeLoveSpain

Twitter = Founded in 2006 a community and microblog service, that allows users to send, update and comment with text based messages (tweets) that can contain a maximum of 140 characters. It has about 300 million active monthly users

Facebook = Founded in 2004 a social networking service that consists of sharing events, post status updates, photos, videos etc. with friends. Facebook has over 1.44 billion monthly active users as of march 2015

Web 2.0 = The internet and online technology as we know it today. Based more on sharing content, the public having real time control over some web content, community-based sharing and using and also social media sites and apps

Apps = Applications, small specific programs with specific functions downloaded onto mobile devices

SM = Social media

## 1 Introduction

The researcher became interested with social media marketing and its potential during a placement at WeLoveSpain. The company uses social media as the main marketing tool and the researcher slowly came up with the idea of writing the thesis about how effective this method would be in general, by using the case company as an example.

### 1.1 Structure of the thesis

The first chapter will give an introductory view of the thesis and what will consist of and introduce the case company. The following chapter will give an overview of the marketing theory and then will continue with exploring the research questions and giving information about them. The third chapter will introduce the research findings. Followed by an analysis of the thesis and the final chapter will be a conclusion.

### 1.2 Outline of the research

The main aim of the research is to find out how effective social media can be as the main marketing tool for an SME by using a student travel agency called WLS as a case study. The effectiveness can be recognized by the booming use of social media in general (Statista, 2015) and by the significant number of students/young people using social media (Pewinternet, 2013). Then by taking into consideration the growing number of WLS customers (WLS Dossiers) and the vast amount of exchange students in Spain, we can also identify the growth and effectiveness within the case company (Europa, 2015; iie, 2013). As an SME is a small company, the budget for marketing is generally limited, and this could further prove that social media marketing could be very effective as a marketing tool. This research will try to address the issue through the research questions and potentially make a solid statement of the effectiveness of social media marketing as the main marketing tool for an SME.

In order to find out significant answers to the research questions the data used will mainly be from existing studies/journals that will clarify the current landscape of social media (marketing), the future of it and also that can the profitability and effectiveness be measured. In addition, supporting data will be used from the results obtained from

the interview and questionnaire. Collecting data from the previously mentioned sources will be done by analyzing and debating the results.

The research questions formulated for this thesis are:

- What is the current social media marketing landscape?
- In what way can a company benefit the most from using social media marketing?
- How can the profitability of social media marketing be measured?
- What is the future of social media marketing?

### 1.3 Rationale for the study

Based on the existing literature the researcher had the capability to study for this thesis no exact study has been done on how effective social media marketing, could be as the main marketing tool for a SME. Multiple studies can be found about social media and marketing and they will serve as supporting information for this research. Social media is constantly changing and no study can entirely be on top of things, especially books about the subject tend to get out dated pretty fast (Wallace, 2013). Nevertheless, by combining the existing studies it is possible to come to a fairly clear conclusion about the size and landscape of social media today and about the profitability and effectiveness of social media marketing. But in order to clearly state the effectiveness of social media marketing as the main marketing tool for an SME an exact study is necessary.

### 1.4 Case study company profile: We Love Spain

We Love Spain was founded in 2006 by David Reina and Elizabeth Kinnon. Prior to the founding of the company they noticed that the students in Seville kept on doing the same things every weekend, even though there would have been countless of other possibilities available as well. That is where the idea of creating a student travel agency derived from. Since, the students themselves were finding it hard to organize trips, meet new people and learn about different cultures on their own, it became apparent

that a need for a student oriented travel agency was needed. After a few years they accomplished their main goals of offering various trips, excursions, events and activities to everyone interested. Now, WLS has sent over 12,000 students, interns and teachers from over 35 nationalities to Morocco, Portugal and throughout Spain and have also organized hundreds of events.

WLS has created a mission including three main goals:

- To help you connect with new international friends in unique and exciting settings.
- To help you learn about the world via cultural and educational travel packages.
- Make those packages completely organized, safe, and affordable so that all study abroad students, interns, or teachers can spend more time making friends and enjoying themselves instead of stressing and planning.

Today We Love Spain is one of the best and most popular youth travel and events company in Spain and the only travel agency recommended by the department of tourism. We Love Spain is an SME, having less than 15 employees. (See organizational structure below. Figure.1)

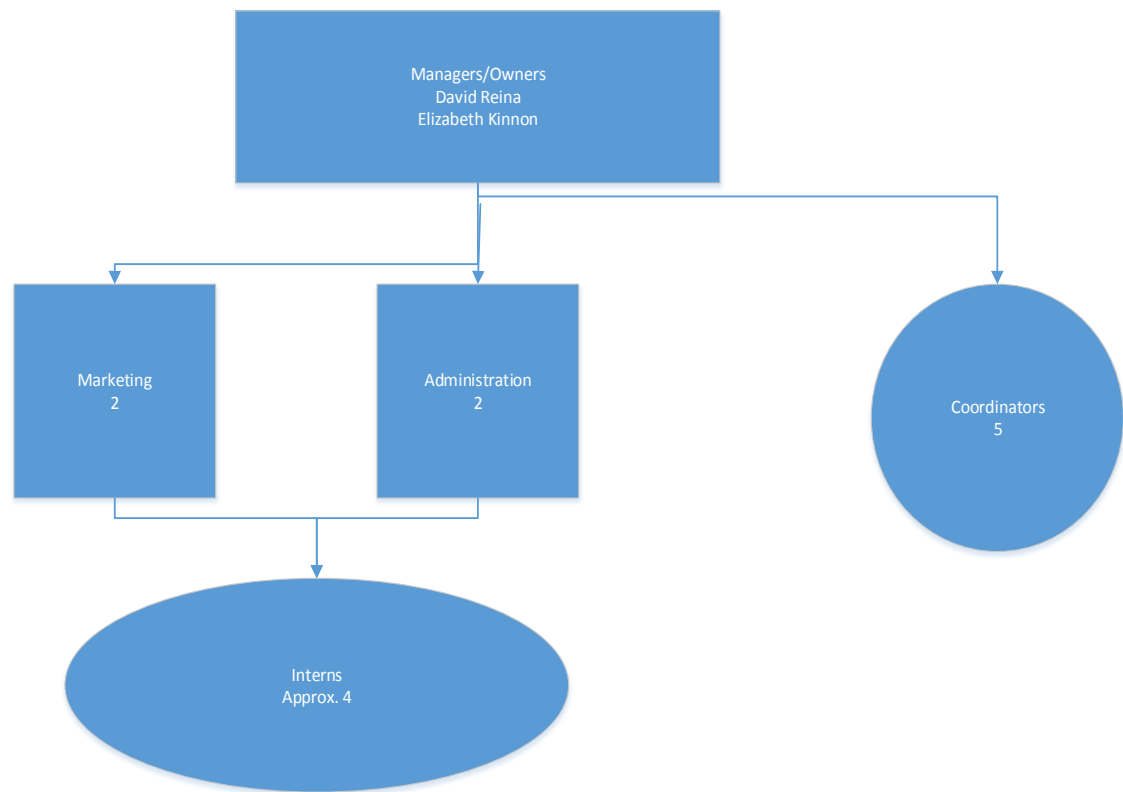


Figure 1. Organizational structure of We Love Spain

The company relies heavily on international interns. The employee turnover rate is high, mainly because the interns generally only work with the company for 6-12 months. This has its advantages and its disadvantages. A clear advantage is that the interns work for free. Interns also tend to make slight improvements or suggestions and generally offer a fresh view of the company. The interns who are leaving are also able to teach the new interns what they do, so that the actual paid staff does not have to take time away from their jobs to do it. Another advantage is that usually new interns are always very motivated and want to prove themselves so they end up getting quite descent results. A disadvantage is that it is not very stable and sustainable to have such a great turnover rate. Especially because, you cannot be sure that what kind of staff you will end up having for that particular semester or year. This is a big disadvantage because it might harm the company's image and end up in significant loss of customers, if an intern does a critical mistake or gets involved in fight for example, then that can really damage the reputation as well.

Being an SME and starting off as a small and local company that used to only operate in Seville, the owners managed by only doing street promotion and a small amount of



Facebook promotion by themselves, however after a while they realized that they could expand the company even without physically being in those new cities.

### 1.5 Literature review

In order for the reader to gain a good understanding of what secondary sources were used and how the research questions were formulated the researcher will list the sources studied and explain their applicability. The researcher used a variety of books, journals, news articles and web sites as sources. Especially news articles and journals were used, mainly because the news articles about social media marketing was one of the reasons why this topic became so appealing and they are valuable sources since they are the most current normally. In addition to that the researcher worked in the case company for six months and became inspired to study the effectiveness of the marketing methods used even further.

The main and most important books used were marketing theory books. These books enabled the researcher to explain the marketing theory aspect behind social media marketing and marketing in general. The first book used was *Principles of Marketing* by Philip Kotler. The previously mentioned book and its different editions are widely considered to be one of the best and most informative books written about marketing. For this reason *Principles of Marketing* was chosen to be one of the main sources for the marketing theory part. One of the other books used was *Marketing Concepts and Strategies* by Sally Dibb et al. which gave some alternate views compared to Kotler. The third main source was *International Marketing* by Philip R. Cateora et al. which had further thoughts about social media marketing. The *Social Media Marketing Book* by Dan Zarella and *Social Media Marketing - The Next Generation of Business Engagement* by Dan Evans with Jake Mckee. These were studied because of their wide take on social media.

Further important literature included statistics acquired from Statista (2014, 2015) which gave important information of social media users worldwide and important figures from a trusted source were found in an article about social media in *The Economist* (2010). The social media examiner provided current figures from 2014 from the marketers' point of view, which gave clear indications to which direction marketing is heading and that was important when formulating the question about the benefits of social media marketing.

The articles by Con (2015), DeMers (2014), helped with the question about the benefits and ROI. Sheth & Sharma (2005) had great insights in a study about social media marketing, its advantages and disadvantages, it gave a good combo of sources as well. For the question about how to measure the profitability of social media marketing, in addition to the sources above a few others were regarded also in high value, such as the Social Media Marketing – The Next Generation of Business Engagement, by Dan Evans (2010). What Evans (2010) and Zarella (2009) wrote about the profitability and benefits really assisted in gathering the main information and theory for that research question.

For the future question a few main articles were used to gather information and help to assess the future of social media marketing and the possible direction of it. The article by Lee (2014) gave the vision of the future by using statistics and projections which were important in trying to predict the future. The article by Knight (2013) explained how in the future the video aspect in social media marketing will be really important. Lastly Ross (2014) described future apps that could possibly be the future of social media marketing and how that would benefit SME's, which was important when trying to relate the future of social media marketing to SME's and their significance.

The methodology books by Saunders (2009) and Jonker (2010) were imperative when trying to find methods that would help to analyse and collect the data. Both authors had many examples and secondary sources that helped the author to create a clear and effective way to deal with the data.

A few books about international marketing were excluded since they focused too much on internationality and basic business and marketing that they were deemed not necessary for this thesis. Same as a number of articles were not included, because either they could not be verified, or they seemed un-reliable, or too old. The researcher tried to gather information when formulating the research questions from sources that would be as current as possible, some exceptions had to be made, but in general this was achieved and that is why also some sources were mainly left out, because they were simply too outdated.

## 2 Overview of social media marketing

Before examining social media marketing, the thesis gives a closer in-depth look at what are the basics of marketing theory and analysing the connection to current social media marketing. Then web 2.0 and social media marketing in the travel industry will be shortly discussed.

This marketing theory section does not examine all the aspects of marketing. Some were deemed not necessary enough to be included in the thesis, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which are: psychological needs (hunger, thirst), safety needs (security, protection), social needs (sense of belonging, love), esteem needs (self-esteem, recognition, status), self-actualization needs (self-development and realization) (Kotler, 2011:148). The only one that would have been applicable would have probably been the social needs, but in a broader view that was not enough to include the hierarchy of need in the marketing theory.

### 2.1 Marketing theory

Two of the main customer-driven marketing theories necessary for any company are the marketing strategy and the marketing mix. The strategic plan defines the company's overall mission and objectives which will then summarize the strategy and marketing mix (Kotler, 2011:48). When marketing a company needs to come up with a marketing strategy which consists of "the marketing logic by which the company hopes to create this customer value and achieve these profitable relationships. The company decides which customers it will serve (segmentation and targeting) and how (differentiation and positioning). It identifies the total market and then divides it into smaller segments, selects the most promising segments, and focuses on serving and satisfying the customers in these segments" (Kotler, 2011:48). Then, guided by the marketing strategy the company will design a marketing mix made up of factors under its control, these include – product, price, place and promotion, known as the four Ps (Kotler, 2011:48). (See below figure 2. The Four Ps of the Marketing Mix)

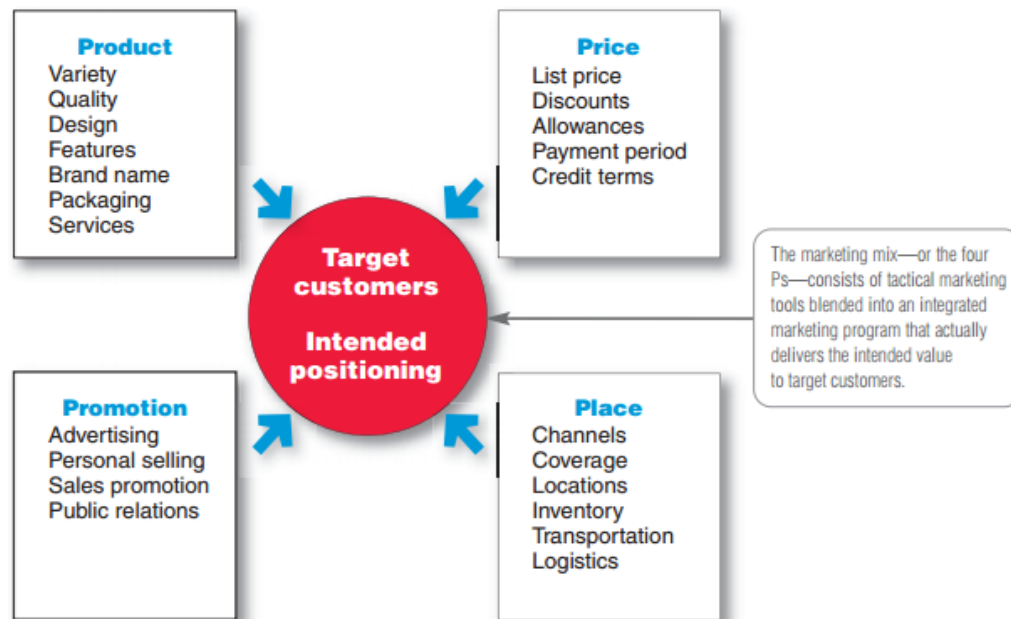


Figure 2. The Four Ps of the Marketing Mix (Kotler, 2011:52)

The four Ps of the marketing mix are almost the same as in the book “Marketing Principles and Strategies”, there is one difference, which can be seen in this description; “The basic ingredients of the marketing mix are product, people, place/distribution, promotion and pricing decisions” (Dibb et al. 2012). The additional one is people apart from that they are the same in both books.

Although, there is a problem with the four Ps, they take the “seller’s view of the market, not the buyer’s view. From the buyer’s viewpoint, in this age of customer value and relationships, the four Ps might be better described as the four Cs” (Kotler, 2011:53).

<b>4Ps</b>	<b>4Cs</b>
Product	Customer solution
Price	Customer cost
Place	Convenience
Promotion	Communication

Figure 3. The four Ps to four Cs (Kotler, 2011:53)

The reason for this is that customers see themselves as buying value or solutions to their problems, they are interested in more than just the price, they want the product or service to be conveniently available and they also want two-way communications (Kotler, 2011:53). Especially the theory of the communication can be directly related to what Con (2015) and Watson et al. 2002; Sheth & Sharma 2005 found as well. Both sources state the importance of the two-way communication and that the social media

acts as a major customer service channel. A good example of this can be seen in the following case:

Many companies have now created teams of specialists that monitor Web conversations and engage disgruntled consumers. In the years since the Dell Hell incident, Dell has set up a 40-member “communities and conversation team,” which does outreach on Twitter and communicates with bloggers. The social media team at Southwest Airlines “includes a chief Twitter officer who tracks Twitter comments and monitors Facebook groups, an online representative who checks facts and interacts with bloggers, and another person who takes charge of the company’s presence on sites such as YouTube, Flickr, and LinkedIn. So if someone posts a complaint in cyberspace, the company can respond in a personal way. (Kotler, 2011)

In addition to the views presented above, there are also other ways of altering the marketing mix or “four Ps”. It can also be modified to suit businesses that provide services, rather than a clear product. “Most authors now mention an additional ingredient of the marketing mix: people. Originally suggested by services marketers who acknowledged that consumers often view the personnel providing a service as part and parcel of the service “product” being offered, the people aspect of the marketing mix has become an accepted part of most businesses’ marketing programmes, and not only for organizations marketing services” (Dibb et al. 2012:644). This fits better with the nature of doing social media marketing with the same principles, but the industry being travel, where the “product” itself basically is a service. The intangibility of the service industry “products” has led to the extended marketing mix for services. The extended marketing mix now includes seven “Ps”: product, promotion, price, place/distribution, process, physical evidence (ambience) and people (Dibb et al. 2012:645).

The promotion part is especially important when the industry is a travel based one. A company that provides this kind of service must do branding well, because it is very important in order to help to differentiate between other rival services, equally important is the promotion of the service providing personnel (Dibb et al. 2012:648). It is very important for a company that provides a service like a travel trip with a travel guide to make sure its personnel is highly skilled, professional and nice because “the employees in a service organization are an important secondary audience for service advertising. Variability in service quality, which arises from labour-intensive nature of many services, is a problem for service marketers, because consumers often associate the service with the service-providing personnel” (Dibb et al. 2012). This also gives a service providing company, like a travel company, a good opportunity to promote the company and gain the customers trust because “when customers enter into a service

transaction, they must, as a general rule, interact with the service organization's employees. Customer contact personnel can be trained to use this opportunity to reduce customer uncertainty, give reassurance, reduce dissonance and promote the reputation of the organization" (Dibb et al. 2012:648).

Following the prior theories it is also necessary to look at another important one, namely when doing marketing analysis the most important tool is the SWOT analysis. This consists of the company's overall strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (see below).

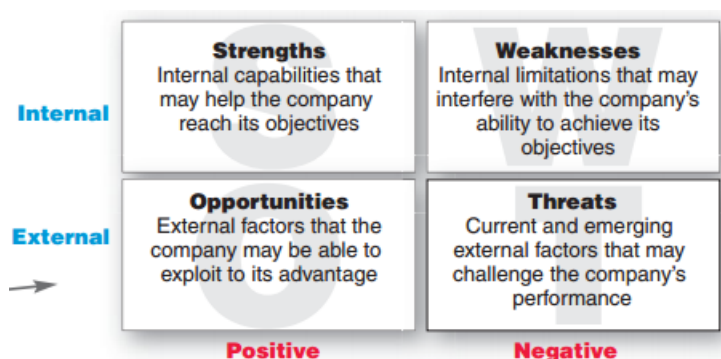


Figure 4. SWOT (Kotler, 2011)

In the book "Marketing Concepts and Strategies" Dibb et al. (2012) describes the SWOT analysis as a popular and widespread way of conducting analysis. The authors (Dibb et al. 2012) label the SWOT analysis as a very simplistic analyzing tool. Nevertheless, they do find an advantage in using the SWOT analysis and describe it as follows "The SWOT analysis, in its simplistic way, has the benefit of placing an organization's strengths and weaknesses in the context of the identified opportunities and threats, so implying the extent to which an organization is capable of leveraging an opportunity or fending off an apparent threat" (Dibb et al. 2012). Combining the views of both of the books does make it apparent that the SWOT analysis may be a bit simplistic, but it is still in its core a very viable marketing analyzing tool. The same methods of analyzing do apply to social media marketing as well.

Since the web has become "an increasingly important PR channel, web sites, blogs, and social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are providing interesting new ways to reach more people. "The core strengths of public relations—the ability to tell a story and spark conversation—play well into the nature of such social media," says a PR expert", especially when there is a way to effectively spark a conversation online about the product or service, it means that it opens the floor for customers to

interact and discuss a company's services further and more easily (Kotler, 2011:456). This then leads to an "old" traditional marketing and brand choice influencer becoming modernized. "Word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising and peer recommendations have always been key influencers of brand choice, but the power of the Internet has changed the pace and reach of WOM." (Cateora et al. 2010). This "WOM" advertising is also backed up by Dibb et al. (2011) as well "Consumers tend to value word-of-mouth communications more than company-sponsored communications. This preference is probably true for all products, but especially for services, because they are experiential in nature. For this reason, service organizations should attempt to stimulate word-of-mouth communications." (Dibb et al. 2011:648). This has led to a new growing part of the customer dialogue which is consumer generated. Basically this means that consumers themselves play a big role in shaping their own brand experiences and those of others. A big part of this might happen through uninvited consumer-to-consumer exchanges in blogs, video-sharing sites and other digital forums (Kotler, 2011:18).

Social media marketing should be targeted to a variety of markets and age groups, not just at young people and companies cannot afford to lose out on using social media as a marketing tool. As Cateora et al. says "Consumer- generated content is having an impact on brands (both positive and negative), and new media are on the agendas of marketers of all products, not just those targeted at young people. Consumers will create content about brands whether the marketers of those brands like it or not" (Cateora et al. 2010). Dibb et al. also supports this "In many markets, companies failing to develop effective websites and digital marketing capability are now at a significant disadvantage. The use of social media to engage with business customers and to build ongoing relationships is a big growth area." (Dibb et al. 2012:642).

Web 2.0 has enabled a lot of things to happen in a marketing sense. Especially relevant for this topic is the changes it has brought to the travel industry. In order to acquire a good sense of what is going on it is necessary to explain what web 2.0 means. Basically "it encompasses the set of tools that allow people to build social and business connections, share information and collaborate on projects online. That includes blogs, wikis, social-networking sites and other online communities, and virtual worlds" (Parise et al. 2008). This basically means that sharing and creating content in online communities is now possible and easier and also that contributing and being more social online has become the norm. The Web 2.0 has basically enabled for all the actions regarding social media marketing mentioned earlier to happen. Since, it is all based on sharing

and interacting with others online. Now an important link with the advances in Web 2.0 can be established. To introduce this link it is necessary to understand that regarding the travel industry “tourism researchers have found that advice from friends and relatives is the most frequently obtained and influential source of information used by consumers in their travel decision making” (Crotts 1999; Perdue 1993 in Pan & Crotts, 2012). This follows the ideas presented earlier in this section of the marketing theory that the “WOM” is really important and it has been around for a while. As Pan & Crotts describe the most credible trustworthy and honest information communication comes from friends and relatives and they are trusted a lot more than the ones generated by marketers (2012). “Advancements in the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies now allow consumers to access personally meaningful critiques not only from friends and relatives but from strangers (e.g. travel blogs, which continue to grow in popularity)” (Pan & Crotts, 2012) the same example can be used for other social media platforms like Facebook. With this comes the enormous risk of what will people say about a company’s services etc.

## 2.2 Social media marketing landscape

While the research for this study will focus mainly on the case company, whose customers are mainly young people and international students, it is necessary to take a look at the current landscape of social media and social media marketing in order to understand the current situation and how social media evolved. The first focus point will therefore be a general overview of the evolvement of social media marketing into its current state, followed by some statistics of social media users and marketers.

Amber King explains the general evolution of social media marketing in her article “The Evolution of Social Media Marketing” for Yahoo! small business. She writes that the dot-com bubble of 1995-2002 was a critical event that allowed the internet to become a viable marketing tool. There is also information about how people shifted from multi-player online games into social networking sites and how eventually the customer’s favorable attitude towards social media marketing changed marketing preferences. The author then continues to describe how marketing executives reacted to the changes and how customer satisfaction and the retaining of customers were done by a brand’s social site. She then goes on to describe how capitalizing on free internet allows companies to potentially reach a huge number of people, “Around 23% of the total time spent on the internet is spent on browsing or interacting within social media sites” (King, no date). According to a statistic 23% of respondents had followed a group or



liked a page created by a brand on Facebook (Statista, 2014). When you take into consideration that the amount of active monthly users on Facebook was 1.44 billion as of the first quarter of 2015, it becomes apparent that we are talking about a very large number of people that could be potentially reached (Statista, 2015). King (no date) also points out an interesting fact about how people today expect automatically that their brands have an online presence.

In order to gain a better understanding of what is going on professionally with social media marketing it is necessary to introduce some statistics that will also prove how big and important social media is for marketers at the moment.

- Most marketers are using social media to develop loyal fans (72%) and gain marketplace intelligence (71%).
- A significant 64% of marketers are using social media for 6 hours or more and 37% for 11 or more hours weekly
- Of those who have been using social media for at least 1 year, 69% found it useful for building a loyal fan base.
- More than half of marketers who've been using social media for at least three years report it has helped them improve sales
- 74% of marketers who spend 40+ hours using social media per week earn new business through their efforts.

The previous statistics are from the Social Media Industry report (Stelzner, 2014). As we can see the marketers trust social media a lot and the popularity just seems to be growing. The fact that 72% of marketers are using social media to develop loyal fans is inline in what Statistica (2014) stats tell us that 23% of the respondents followed a group or liked a page created by a brand on Facebook. The efforts of the marketers can be seen in the amount of people liking the Facebook brand page. In relation to these facts it is important to note the amount of people who believe in their friends' opinions on products and services this can be seen in the figure 5. (Below)

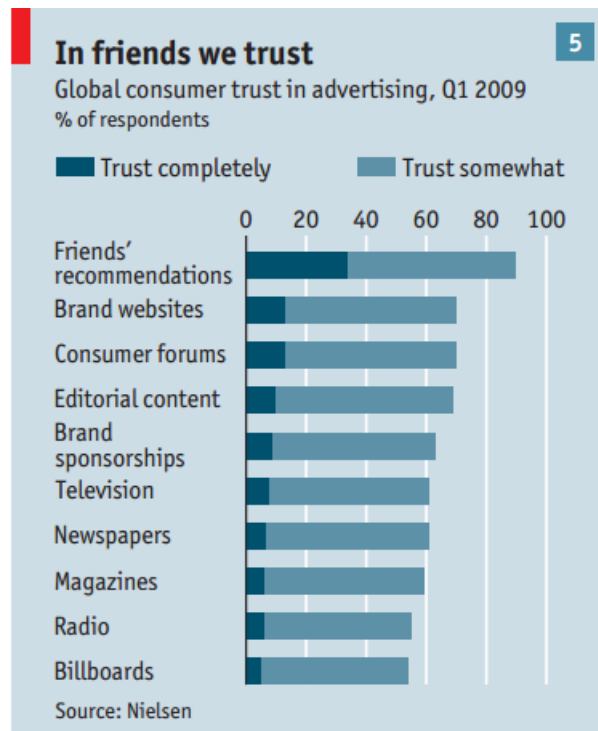


Figure 5. Global consumer trust in advertising, Q1 2009 % of respondents, (The Economist, 2010)

In chapter 2.1 the importance of word-of-mouth advertising and peer recommendations were supported by Cateora et al. (2010) and Dibb et al. (2011), which of the later stated that “Consumers tend to value word-of-mouth communications more than company-sponsored communications. This preference is probably true for all products, but especially for services”. The consumer trust in advertising figure above highlights this in an obvious way. Even though the source of where the “friends” recommend something is not mentioned, based on the time people generally spend on social media (see figure 6.) it is safe to say that a big part of the friends recommendations happen based on social media or within social media channels. The fact that this is true especially for service offering companies makes the statement even more significant for this thesis, since the case company is a trip and event organizing SME. In addition the majority of the customers are from the USA, Italy, Britain and Germany, which are all among the top social media users in the world. (See figure 6. below)

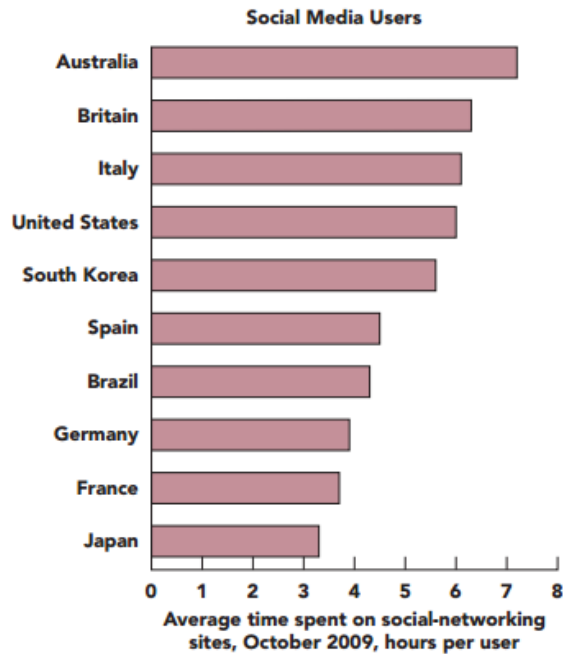


Figure 6. Average time spent on social-networking sites. (Nielsen in Cateora et al. 2010)

With all the hype going on about social media marketing and its growing and popular times, the researcher thinks it is necessary to consider that even though the current landscape of social media marketing is very favorable big mistakes can be made. A part of the current situation is that companies might believe in the popularity of social media to provide a company with more sales and not enough effort is put into the actual social media marketing part, because they trust the popularity of social media too much (Parkinson-Hardman, 2014).

### 2.3 Benefiting from using social media marketing

The route for companies to start benefiting from social media marketing started when “In 2007, Facebook finally let organizations create brand pages. It was touted, essentially, as free marketing access to Facebook’s growing audience of highly desirable young adults” (Con 2015). This led to a scenario where “Brands realized how powerful social marketing could be and began investing in bigger teams and more thought-out social strategies” (Con 2015). This made it possible for customers to communicate back to the companies and that two-way communication created a big opportunity, which caused the brand owners to react and start using social media as a major customer service channel (Con 2015). “Social media platforms increase reach and reduce costs by providing three areas of advantage for customers”(Watson et al. 2002; Sheth

& Sharma 2005, in Nadaraja & Yazdanifard) and within these three advantage areas we can recognize and support what Con said about brand owners starting to use social media as a major customer service channel. The three advantage areas being “the marketing firm can provide unlimited information to customers without human intervention, social media marketing firm can create interactions by customizing information for individual customers that allow customers to design products and services that meet their specific requirements, social media platforms can allow transactions between customers and firms that would typically require human contact” (Watson et al. 2002; Sheth & Sharma 2005, in Nadaraja & Yazdanifard). Now when “every day 864 million people around the world check Facebook” (Peterson 2015), it is not a surprise that “social media networks are just new channels for your brand’s voice and content” (DeMers 2014). In addition the losses are minimal, “realistically, you do not have anything to lose by getting involved in social media. The amount of time and money it takes to create your profiles and start posting is usually minimal, compared to other marketing channels. Just six hours a week or a few hundred dollars is all it takes to establish your presence” (DeMers 2014). For example with Facebook it is very effective to target any specific demographic you want, you can choose age groups, hobbies, certain groups and the time of the day to send the advertising messages, testing which groups are the best for a certain business (Wheeler in Ingham, 2014). By using the “Driftrock” companies can use data collected on Facebook to be more successful (Ingham, 2014). “You can reach more customers, cheaper, through the power of data”. The team have developed a suite of tools, each designed as a separate app, to help optimise brand’s social media campaigns” (Wheeler in Ingham, 2014).

## 2.4 Measuring the profitability of social media marketing

When in 2007 Facebook allowed organizations to create brand pages it was enough for companies to just reach their audience and get a message in front of them and that was already regarded as a success and as a small return on investment (ROI), while the investment was small as well (Con, 2015). “As the social networks continued to grow and mature, social marketers also became more sophisticated”(Con, 2015) and so it became necessary to figure out a way to calculate a ROI for social media marketing. When talking about calculating and collecting some kind of data to be measured from doing social media marketing another method in addition to ROI has to be looked at and that method is KPI (key performance indicators). When measuring ROI you are nearly always measuring something in financial terms, like increased revenue, cost

savings, or cost avoided as a result of an investment but you should also consider KPIs – numerical “key performance indicators” like conversions or new registrations, also the intangible value of having a presence in specific social channels (Evans, 2010:141). This is supported by Zarrella as well; “The actual metrics you’ll use to measure your accomplishments toward a goal are called key performance indicators (KPIs). For instance, if you’re trying to increase your reach on Twitter, your KPI could be followers, and your stated goal should include an exact number of followers” (Zarrella, 2010:221).

There are systems available that will help a company to actively monitor Twitter for mentions of a company’s products or services and ascertain the social influence of those talking about them, this will help in prioritizing a company’s response effort which is decidedly not free (Evans, 2010:128). Then in accordance to what Zarrella said before about the KPI being for example followers on twitter, Evans states also that the data collected about the twitter mentions of a company that “This data translates directly into meaningful key performance indicators (KPIs), too: The number of mentions on Twitter, positives versus negatives, average influencer rankings, and mean response time are all examples of KPIs.” (Evans, 2010:128).

Another way to reach an understanding of ROI is to count visitors to for instance a company’s website and study people traversing the site before they make an actual purchase, this gives a way to spot visitors earlier in the process and that enables the ability to implement specific practices that drive the conversions further (Evans, 2010:156). There is way to do this by connecting the changes in qualified traffic to specific social Web-based programs (Evans, 2010) that might cost money, like the twitter monitoring system mentioned in the previous section might cost around \$100 a month if you would use a system like BuzzStream (Evans, 2010). This ends up basically meaning that “managers and executives want to see a real ROI. The value of a “like” or “favorite” or even a follower on social is highly debatable, and for most businesses, would not cut it as a business metric. They want conversions and proof that their investment in social media marketing is creating revenue” (Con 2015). The basic way to calculate the actual ROI is to “simply deduct the cost of your social media work (include monetary and time investments) from the income generated. If the result is a positive number, your investment has been profitable” (Zarrella, 2010:209).

Then in some cases at least a part of the ROI can be measured when dealing with social media. That is the case with what (Con 2015) said about brand owners starting to

use social media as a major customer service channel, which makes it possible for giving an example of a ROI: "Support calls have a known cost. Support incidents that are fully resolved in a support forum represent a call-center cost avoided, leading directly to formal ROI measures and standards" (Evans, 2010).

## 2.5 Future of social media marketing

One of the most interesting possible new additions to various social media platforms could be the introduction of the "buy" button. Facebook and Twitter "are testing "buy" buttons, moving one step closer to generating meaningful retail sales after years of collecting information on consumer shopping habits, analysts said. The firms hope the feature will make it easier for impulse shoppers to purchase everything from nail polish to hoodies" (Lee, 2014). This would make it a lot easier for companies to sell on social media and for consumers to purchase. From the consumers point of view this makes it a lot more convenient to purchase something that is put in front of them while browsing through social media, creating the opportunity for the ultimate impulse buy and in addition the consumers does not have to go to the retailers website separately (Lee,2014). With the "buy" button measuring ROI becomes a lot more tangible, as mentioned in chapter 2.2 the measuring of ROI in social media is very difficult, the buy button would make it a lot easier.

"The growing popularity of social networks and their rise as the number one activity online makes them the place that businesses can go to achieve mass awareness. "Big brands are paying for social (and driving up the price of advertising)" (Neher, 2014), this means that in the future the amount of paid marketing for any company using social media as a marketing tool might rise and the prices as well. There is still room for unpaid marketing as well. The company just has to be very creative when producing content so that it gets noticed by the social media users that are already seeing a lot of everything in their news feeds (Neher, 2014). Based on the nature of this thesis it has to be mentioned that interviewee A pointed out that at the moment the cost of paid marketing on Facebook is so low that it is very advantageous to use it at the same time while doing unpaid marketing as well to maximize the visibility on social media.

"We can't deny it. It's everywhere we go, it's everything we see. It's social media and it symbolizes where we are as a society: Interconnected... and it is here to stay. Social media is a marketers' dream. It allows your audience to watch you -- as a brand -- de-

velop, grow, and evolve. Many of your most loyal fans and followers are engaged in your lives and businesses through social media” (Green, 2014). The previous quote gives a clear brief overview of how social media is viewed and that it truly can be a marketers dream. In addition there are facts and figures that support this view and below you can see one of them. (See figure 7. below)

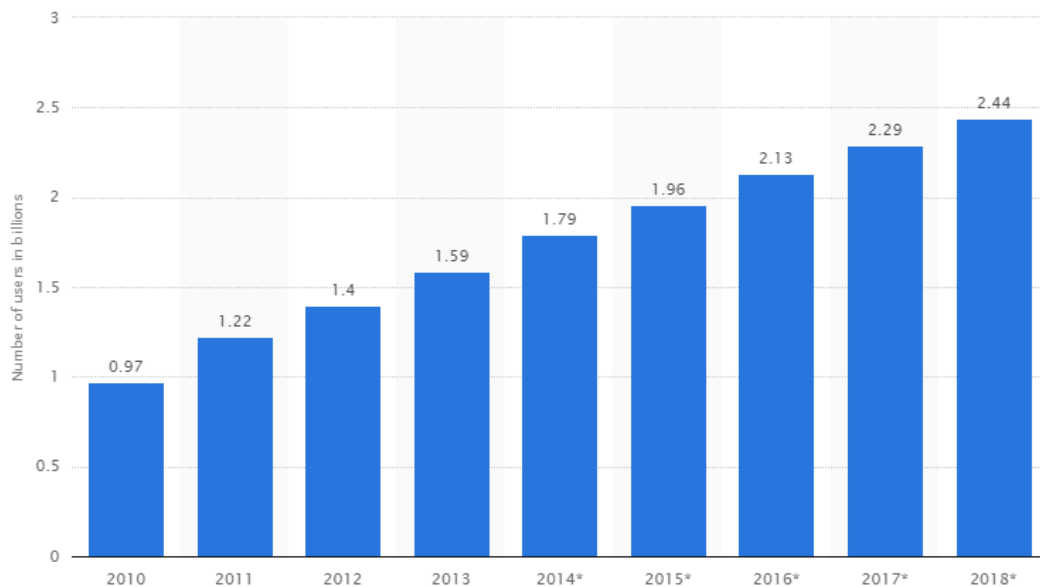


Figure 7. Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2014 with projections until 2018, (Statista, 2014)

Figure 7 gives us a clear indication of what has been occurring since 2010 and where it is possibly heading towards. The amount of social network users is projected to just keep on growing. The conclusion from this figure is that it seems to be quite apparent that social media will keep on creating great visibility for companies in the future as well.

The way how this promotional activity should happen is quite broad, but Knight (2013) offers a solution for this. The way to go is video, because “it is an effective way to communicate with your audience. 70% of social media users would rather watch a video than look at a picture or read a paragraph of writing. Showcasing your products through video is much easier for a customer to understand the product. If your business is based on products or services that require a demonstration, you will find video marketing the only effective solution” (Knight, 2013). This makes sense and gives an example for companies where to go with their marketing plans.

Now to end with a few examples of the possible future of social media and what would that mean to SME's. The founder of EdgEE, Markus Maier describes the new social media as a platform that changes how people share and consume content online. EdgEE allows to post with more context and in-depth exploration (Ross, 2014). This could be useful for small businesses when trying to reach out potential audiences in a way that promotes substance over show: (Ross, 2014), "In this way, it will be easy for small businesses to demonstrate their expertise and gain attention through their unique insights. We believe this to be a rather genuine and organic way for small businesses to develop trust and understanding with potential clients" (Maier in Ross, 2014). Another example of something useful in the future for SME's could be "YourInterest", which is a website that connects people based on their interests created by Ekaterina Lengefeld (Ross, 2014). Lengefeld describes "YourInterest" and its potential for small businesses: "I think people are getting fatigued with social media. You have to create a profile and build up this online persona. YourInterest is great for small businesses because they can put on events through the app and invite other members with similar interests to events, thus getting more notice" (Lengefeld in Ross, 2014). These were just two examples of what the future might potentially bring, especially for small businesses. A general idea of the future of social media networks are that they will become more detailed and will not compete with the greats, such as Facebook or Twitter but rather work alongside with them, offering something new and useful for a certain group of people. With the social media possibly becoming more focused and smaller in a sense this will offer small businesses good opportunities to be seen and heard in specific ways and target exactly what they want even more effectively.

An appropriate way to end the future chapter is by a quote from the Forbes article "The Year Social Moves Beyond Social Media". The author describes the not so far future: "On New Year's Day 2016 you'll still be able to log on to Facebook, comment on your friend's feed and do "social" things. Brands will continue to be part of popular conversation on Twitter and LinkedIn Pulse. And our Instagram profiles will still be intact in their succinctness. But social will have moved beyond social media, and we'll be talking about communications, media, relationships and, most important, just the way things are" (Bolman, 2015).



### 3 Research findings

For the research to be sufficient enough, both qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods were chosen. Qualitative research methods are appropriate when working with open research questions (Jonker, 2010: 78), also qualitative research methods are equally suitable when one of the main sources of data is an interview and an interview type questionnaire (Saunders, 2009:320:360). Quantitative research methods are necessary when the research explores and analyzes data from sales figures (Saunders, 2009:441) With the aim of providing research results with the best variety of data and the most suitable evidence, the decision was made to use a 'multi-method' approach that combines the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Jonker, 2010:91).

In addition to the above, the researcher has worked for the case company, which enabled couple of important types of research methods. There might be complications that might arise. On the one hand this gives the researcher a slightly more inside view of the company which helps the researcher from the start to formulate a deeper understanding of the operations of the case company. On the other hand this might cause a slight problem for the researcher in being fully impartial, since it might be hard not to let the first hand experiences have an effect on the research.

#### 3.1 Collecting the data

Data was collected in a variety of ways in order to get a good enough selection of information. Secondary data (Saunders 2009:256) was collected from articles, journals, other studies and research and from the documents acquired from the case company including i.e. sales figures. For a more detailed view of what literature was used to collect the data see chapter 1.5 literature review. Secondary data collection was necessary in order to gain prior knowledge of the subject. Since, the field of social media is broad and fast evolving (Wallace, 2013). The former made it obvious that trying to gain as much information on the subject as possible before conducting an interview and an interview type questionnaire would be important, because knowing the field well would be an advantage when conducting the interviews and research. The secondary data collected and the information the researcher gained while working for the case compa-

ny made it possible for the researcher to have a discussion with the interviewee during the interview rather than just listen. This led to good results and further information.

Since one of the main data collection methods was an interview done with the founder and CEO of the case company whose is interviewee A as well, it seemed like a fitting idea to conduct the interview using a semi-structured non standardized in-depth interview method (Saunders, 2009), which gave the interviewer the opportunity to further “probe” for answers in order to get the interviewee to further explain and build on their responses. “Probing questions can be used to explore responses that are of significance to the research topic. They may be worded like open questions but request a particular focus or direction” (Saunders 2009:338). Another key benefit acquired by using this method was, that sometimes the “probing” led the interview into new areas through the discussion that arose and that in return allowed the interviewer to gain significant data that would be useful when considering the research questions (Saunders 2009:324). In addition, when the questions are complex or open-ended, the semi-structured or in-depth interview would be the most suitable method to collect data (Saunders 2009:324). This also justifies the use of the previously mentioned methods. The questions used in the interview were open questions, “An open question is designed to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and developmental answer, and may be used to reveal attitudes or obtain facts” (Grummitt 1980, in Saunders 2009:337), the open questions also “encourages the interviewee to reply as they wish” (Saunders 2009:337). This then gave the interviewee the opportunity to speak and discuss freely about the subject in hand to ensure that the interviewee would receive truly open and honest opinions. The interview was audio-recorded, to ensure that the interviewee could fully concentrate and listen more attentively to what is said and to focus also on what expressions and non-verbal cues the interviewee could give when they are responding (Saunders 2009:339). The researcher made the decision to audio-record the interview after comparing the advantages and disadvantages of audio-recording, based on the following figure. (See below)

**Table 10.3** Advantages and disadvantages of audio-recording the interview

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows interviewer to concentrate on questioning and listening</li> <li>• Allows questions formulated at an interview to be accurately recorded for use in later interviews where appropriate</li> <li>• Can re-listen to the interview</li> <li>• Accurate and unbiased record provided</li> <li>• Allows direct quotes to be used</li> <li>• Permanent record for others to use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May adversely affect the relationship between interviewee and interviewer (possibility of 'focusing' on the audio-recorder)</li> <li>• May inhibit some interviewee responses and reduce reliability</li> <li>• Possibility of a technical problem</li> <li>• Time required to transcribe the audio-recording (Section 13.3)</li> </ul>

Sources: authors' experience; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008); Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005); Healey and Rawlinson (1994).

Figure 8. The Advantages and disadvantage of audio-recording the interview from authors' experience; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008); Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005); Healey and Rawlinson (1994), in Saunders 2009:341

The researcher also chose to make brief notes that helped maintain focus (Ghauri and Grønhaug 2005, in Saunders 2009:339). The interview focused on gaining an in-depth all round view of the case company's way of handling their social media marketing. This was achieved by concentrating the interview questions on the company's social media history, marketing, sales and budgeting.

In addition to the interview with the founder of the case company, a number of employees were also interviewed by using a set of open-ended questions, which allowed the respondents to give answers in their own way (Fink 2003, in Saunders 2009:374). The questions used were mainly modified versions of the interview questions used for the interview of the founder of the case company some questions were also removed all together, because the founder would be the only one who could know the answers to certain questions. For the sake of the research the questions tried to focus on getting a response to the research questions, by constructing the questions in such a manner that when answered a response addressing the research questions would be guaranteed. The interview questionnaire was sent to each employee as an e-mail. By doing this, the researcher could make sure that the person answering the questions would be the certain employee that is supposed the answer them, even if the researcher and respondent did not see each other face to face (Witmer *et al.* 1999, in Saunders 2009:363).

### 3.2 Analysis of the data

Secondary data was analyzed by examining the relativity of each source to the research questions and information needed and then by carefully grouping the information accordingly based on the research questions. This enabled the researcher to efficiently examine the data in relation to the research questions and made it easier to keep track of the obtained data.

The quantitative data used is mainly comprised of the sales figures and other financial statements acquired from the case company. For that reason the quantitative data analysis is pretty straightforward, since the tables and figures are clear and done already by the company the researcher could then effectively gather and analyze only the most necessary ones. This helped to formulate a sufficient analysis of the quantitative data in relation to the information needed in order to form a solid picture for the appropriate research questions.

In order to effectively analyze the qualitative data, the interview was transcribed, because of its significance for the research. The researcher made the decision to only transcribe the sections of each audio-recording that were pertinent to the research (data sampling), based on the Table 13.2 Alternative ways of reducing the time needed to transcribe audio-recordings (Saunders 2009:486). The researcher deemed that the potential problems of using this method would be the most easiest to mitigate (Saunders 2009:486). The interview based questionnaires were analyzed by grouping the similar minded answers together and by comparing them to the data received from the interview and to the secondary data collected. Since the questions were already formulated in a way that they would give views on the research questions, made it more effective to compare the different types of data.

For analyzing all of the data a categorizing method was used. This involves two activities: developing categories and attaching these categories to meaningful chunks of data, by doing this it was possible to recognize relationships and further develop the categories used to facilitate it all (Saunders 2009:492). In addition to this the researcher found it useful to combine the method mentioned above to the method of summarizing the information and notes acquired. This made it possible to compress long statements into brief statements and to rephrase the main points into a few words (Kvale

1996, in Saunders 2009:491). Summarizing and categorizing data enabled the researcher to effectively analyze and compare the all data collected.

## 4 Analysis

In this section the researcher will gather the most important research findings and analyze them so that they will address the research questions properly.

Based on the methods of collecting and analyzing data from section 3 the researcher studied numerous sources (see section 1.5) to gain a comprehensive overview of marketing theory in general and about social media marketing. The researcher conducted four interviews to gain an inside perspective of the case company and how they use social media marketing.

In section 2.2 it is established that a vast number of people use social media (see Figures 6 and 7) actively, in addition to this the amount of marketers using social media as a marketing tool is also big and growing (see figure 7). When looking at the interview answers (see appendix 3) there is a clear link with the research findings. All interviewees agree that the major portion of the case company's marketing is done via social media. This supports the findings that social media marketing is a popular marketing tool. Especially when in chapter 2.2 it becomes obvious that a major part of marketers try to gain brand loyalty and popularity by using social media and the interviewees agree as well.

Interviewee B explains how the most important benefits of social media marketing for the company is to get more visibility, so the potential customers would see them more easily and that once they get their attention and they possibly start to use their services it will be easier to retain them. This answer is directly supported by the following quote which can be found in section 2.3: "Social media platforms increase reach and reduce costs...Watson et al. 2002; Sheth & Sharma 2005, in Nadaraja & Yazdanifard). This is an important aspect for any business and by social media marketing it seems to be becoming more effective and targeted. In section 2.1 Kotler says that a company decides which customers it will serve and then segment and target that group (2011:48). This can be seen done very effectively in social media marketing, as mentioned in section 2.3 there is even a service that companies can use to reach more customers and it

helps you target and reach any specific demographic and even optimize the time of day when sending the advertising messages (Wheeler in Ingham, 2014). Especially interviewees C and D had similar thoughts on the matter. Interviewee D says "...our target social group focus on young students traveling abroad from their home, so a group of people that spends a lot of time a day in social media." and Interviewee C describes how effective it is when certain marketers know how to find the right people and "hit the right spots".

A company can benefit a lot from using social media marketing as the main marketing tool, not many marketing tools offer. According to interviewee B social media marketing offers "the possibility of a richer customer experience, it's much easier to publicly demonstrate our customer service level and heighten the relationship with our customers. If somebody leave a good review about us we can thank them publicly, otherwise we can immediately apologize and take actions", this statement is in-line with what is mentioned on page 8 that people want two-way communications (Kotler, 2011:53) and that can be also related to what Con (2015) and Watson et al. 2002; Sheth & Sharma 2005 say in section 2.3 about two-way communication being a big and useful opportunity and that the social media acts as a major customer service channel.

The inexpensive marketing that social media enables when talking about Facebook and Twitter is something that all interviewees agree upon. The researcher agrees base on the results that the low-cost marketing that social media offers is very beneficial.

For example Facebook offers a new and modern meaning for word-of-mouth marketing. Interviewee A agrees fully that "WOM" is something very beneficial acquired from using social media. As mentioned in section 2.1 Word-of-mouth has always been a key influencer, but now it has been modernized (Cateora et al. 2010). The "WOM" advertising is also backed up by Dibb et al. (2011). It is important to note that consumer's value "WOM" communications more than company sponsored communications as mentioned in section 2.1. This is of a key importance to companies doing social media marketing. The image they portray is vital and "WOM" can have a huge influence in their customer numbers. Especially, this is true with the case company which offers tours and trips and such, bad experiences amount to bad reviews, which means that business will suffer.

Interviewee A states that the profitability can be seen when especially looking at sales coming from other cities than the city that the company is based in. Then all interviewees agree on the fact that this gives clear proof that social media marketing is effective and it can be seen in their returns. Even though it was mentioned in section 2.4 that measuring ROI can be very challenging and that some metrics do help in this task. Interviewer A agrees on using for example Facebook metrics to acquire information of users and try to help understand their ROI. But at its basic meaning a company can see ROI when calculating their investments and looking at how much money they make on a particular venture. In addition KPIs should be looked at (examples of KPIs can be found in section 2.4). Interviewee A does acknowledge the fact that using social media channels like Facebook or Twitter does allow the company to increase followers and reach, which measure certain accomplishments mentioned by Evans (2010) and Zarrella (2010).

The researcher finds it necessary to display one important proof of benefit, results and returns that social media marketing can bring. The sales by city figure (see below) gives a clear indication that social media marketing is bringing in customers very effectively.

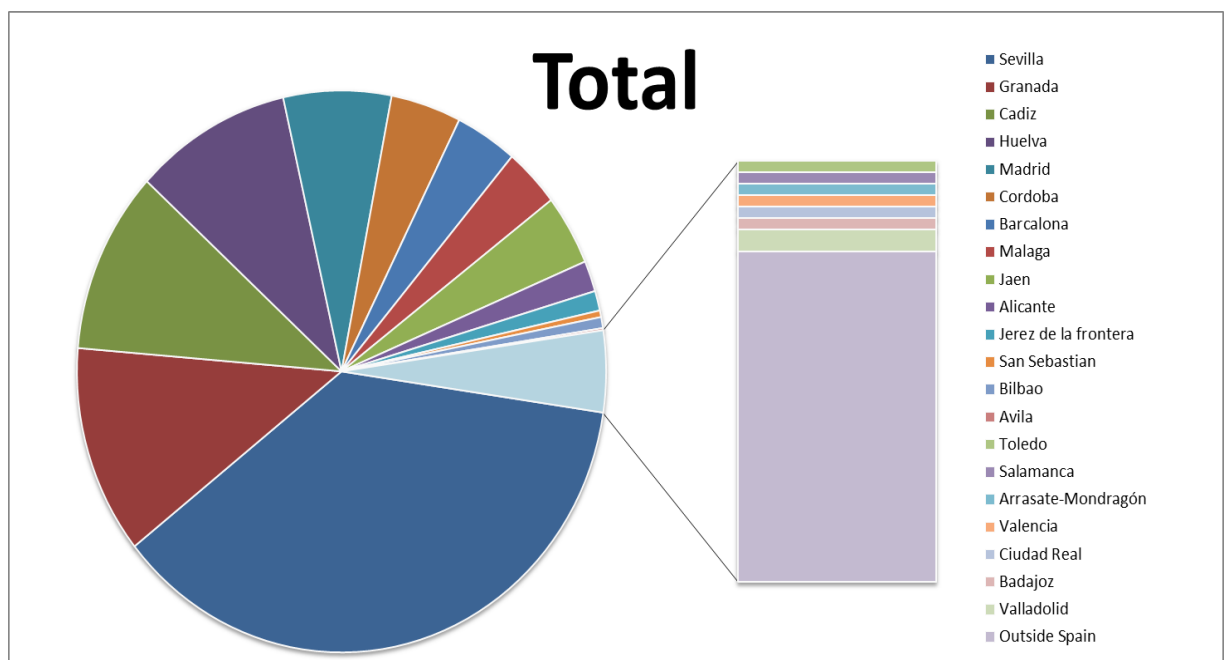


Figure 9. Sales by city, WLS

Interviewees A, B and C state that since social media marketing is the only marketing used when marketing in other cities than the one they are physically present it is proof

of it really working. Even though the case company represents the travel industry it does not take away from the fact that whatever product or service you promote/sell you can do it in similar ways and it will potentially bring results as mentioned in section 2.1.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the analysis section and with the all the results acquired from this research it is appropriate to say that social media marketing is an effective marketing tool at least for a SME in the travel industry. The researcher can't state that the same methods would work with same efficiency and guarantee a full success rate. Even though there is evidence that supports this claim also. It has to be taken into consideration that apart from the interviews that gave factual concrete evidence of operational success for the case company, other results may vary for different SMEs especially in different industries. As mentioned earlier the results do support that good results would be obtained by using social media marketing in other industries as well, especially when a product or service is still a product or service even if you alter the industry. Findings also suggest that with the right method, approach and tools when using social media marketing as the main marketing tool it can be extremely successful and cost efficient for any SME. One of the main points that social media marketing offers to any SME in any industry is the ability to use it as a highly effective and low-cost customer service channel. Also, the word-of-mouth marketing proved to be very important and that type of marketing would work for any SME in any industry and good reviews are crucial for any company.

It would have been necessary to study the topic even further, but time limitations came into play. Another case company from a different industry would have proven to be important for this type of research, because it would have enabled to compare them and try to find differences in effectiveness and types of marketing methods. This was not done, because of the time limitations. For additional and further research this would be a good idea to study further. Adopting another company to compare with would have provided broader results and clearer implications of the effectiveness. Furthermore the sheer volume of the available information regarding this topic was overwhelming. Some journals and articles might have proven to be useful but had to be left out because the time frame did not allow enough time to go over everything that the researcher found. With more time even more sources could have been examined that



could have had a further impact on the results, but based on the results already gathered they would have been on the same lines as the used research material.

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## **Interviewee profiles**

Interviewee profiles

Interviewee A: Elizabeth Kinnon, Founder of WeLoveSpain

Interviewee B: Marcela Cazacu, Head of marketing

Interviewee C: Laura Laitasalo, Administration

Interviewee D: Amanda Paradis, Administration/Designer

## Interview questions

### Questions for interviewee A

1. What do you think is the ratio between SM marketing and other types of marketing within your company?
2. Since when have you used social media marketing?
3. Was it a deliberate choice to focus on social media (facebook) marketing? /What was behind the decision to choose SM marketing as the main marketing tool?
4. Is there a concrete link with how much SM marketing you do with your sales? And does this provide you with concrete proof of SM marketing getting results?
5. Have you considered the costs of other marketing methods compared with SM marketing?
6. How much do you use the built in marketing (paid marketing) on facebook? Would it be possible and effective to operate without it, to cut the costs of marketing even further?
7. Is there a way that you can measure the ROI of SM marketing? What about the ROI of employees (Time + effort)? Does this take away efforts from other tasks, is it worth it. Is it impossible to measure?
8. In what way do you think that you could make your marketing even more effective? With more people working on it etc? Follow up question do you think travel agencies especially should join more together to do marketing? Would this get better results? It doesn't cost anything? And more visibility etc?
9. Do you feel that SM marketing could replace other more traditional ways of marketing (within the travel industry)?

10. SM marketing helps create a new kind of word of mouth marketing, would you agree? (Customers can rate and discuss about the product more easily.)
11. Are you planning on developing the SM marketing even further? I.e. Twitter, Instagram, etc?
12. Do you think that there is a fear that people would lose interest in social media completely, or is it here to stay?
13. What about social media, is it a fad?

Extra question: Fear of people changing social media channels or people losing interest in SM completely? Or is it here to stay.

#### Interview questions for interviewees B, C and D

1. What do you think is the ratio between social media marketing and other types of marketing within the company?
2. Do you think that it was a deliberate choice for the company to use social media marketing as the main marketing tool?
3. In what way could you prove that there is a concrete link with how much social media marketing you do with the company's sales? And in your opinion does this provide a way of measuring the profitability of social media marketing?
4. Do you feel that you are getting a return for your efforts when doing social media marketing? Also in a sense that the hours you put in aren't taking time away from your other tasks, or are the sales the most important thing?
5. In your opinion in what way can the company benefit the most from using social media marketing?
6. Do you think it is absolutely necessary for We Love Spain to use social media marketing? Why?

7. Depending on the industry do you think it's necessary for other small and medium sized companies to use social media marketing?
8. In your opinion what is the future of social media marketing?



## Interview questions

### Questions and answers from interviewee A

1. What do you think is the ratio between SM marketing and other types of marketing within your company?

We do almost all social media marketing, like 9 to 1 (90%) We also have our e-mails and flyers and publicity routes but I would say in general it is like 90% of social media marketing and Facebook being almost 90% of that.

2. Since when have you used social media marketing?

In 2007 when the company was founded, one of the co-founders had just created a Facebook account. That time it was still very new for Europeans. We began really using it by 2008/2009. That time we started to realize that it would be a useful tool and also how important it would be. That time we didn't even realize that we could expand as company by using Facebook, we were only focusing on Seville and I don't think it really clicked with us that we could use it to sell to people in other cities until like 2010/2011. That time we realized that we could work in many other cities effectively as well.

3. Was it a deliberate choice to focus on social media (facebook) marketing? /What was behind the decision to choose SM marketing as the main marketing tool?

Yes! Especially for our company, not necessarily for small companies in other markets, it might be useful, but especially for our market. Because mainly everybody in our market is university aged people and it's a very young market and because of that social media is absolutely essential. So yes it was a deliberate choice also, because when we started we were making phone calls to clients and e-mails, it was very person to person and then we realized that everyone had Facebook and that everyone used it all the time and people were obsessed with it and then that digital marketing was working a lot better than the flyers and it was faster and cheaper and also because it's free.

4. Is there a concrete link with how much SM marketing you do with your sales? And does this provide you with concrete proof of SM marketing getting results?

Yes, the concrete link can be seen especially in the expansion part of it, because I can see after I do an analysis on sales that how many people come from different cities and those are cities that we've never talked to any programs at and that we've never done any kind of marketing in what so ever except for social media, that's the only way that people really even find out about us. Then the other option is that if they just randomly go on google and look up trips and we just pop up in their search. But I would say that 99% of the people who get to know us, is because they saw us on Facebook. And I can see that in the sales. And obviously of course then even within Seville people might come up to me and be like "Hi Elizabeth, right?" and it's because they've seen be on Facebook, not because they have heard of me from friends or anything it's just because they've seen me on Facebook, that's it.

5. Have you considered the costs of other marketing methods compared with SM marketing?

Yeah, but the thing about my company in general is that it's such a specific market that, putting up sort of billboards or any kind of more general type of publicity is sort pointless for us and it would be sort of a waste of money, because let's say I put billboards/posters in the metro for example and pay for them it's sort of a huge waste of money, because of the people walking in and out of those public spaces I'm really only looking for a tiny percentage of them to look at the billboard and I don't care about any of the other people so it would be a huge waste of money for us to do something like that. It is such a specific market and that's why social media and especially Facebook is so key for us because we can directly find our market that way and finding really specific markets for us and for that Facebook is the best way to go.

6. How much do you use the built in marketing (paid marketing) on facebook? Would it be possible and effective to operate without it, to cut the costs of marketing even further?

We do use paid marketing on Facebook. We spend approximately 1500€-2000€ on that. But it is definitely useful because it's a way to make sure that people see our ads on Facebook. The cost is marketing wise relatively really cheap and it really is way that our market is getting our ads. Because Facebook is so ADD. There is so much going on between your newsfeed your messages and notifications people could easily not see your notifications and they might forget about your events and Facebook is not made for long attention spans and this way they will not forget about us and the paid ads are a way to make sure that people get our notifications and it's going into their news feed and it's right in their face.

7. Is there a way that you can measure the ROI of SM marketing? What about the ROI of employees (Time + effort)? Does this take away efforts from other tasks, is it worth it. Is it impossible to measure?

Probably there is some sort of Facebook analysis that might do this but I'm not that familiar with it. We are just getting onto Google analytics right now to see how many people go on our website but on Facebook I don't think there is a specific way to see if someone books a trip because of our promotion. Right now I can see who goes to our website from Facebook, but I don't know if they necessarily book. I can see if they have come to our website from Facebook and the people who visit the website 90% come from Facebook.

A way to measure that is that I can see by looking at our sales, which tells me how many people book from each city. And from that I know that the time each promoter puts towards a city is paying off, because many people end up booking from that specific city. And taking time away from other tasks, not really since sales for me is the number one thing. I want them to spend the most amount of time on getting sales.

8. In what way do you think that you could make your marketing even more effective? With more people working on it etc? Follow up question do you think travel agencies especially should join more together to do marketing? Would this get better results? It doesn't cost anything? And more visibility etc?

Yes, to an extent. We pretty much have all of Spain covered, but I could have a new intern working in Paris to get international students from there and actually now we are getting more international customers outside of Spain, because we did that collaboration with the European company. So now we are starting to see results with that, so obviously more employees mean more production if they are trained well and are doing their work correctly, but yes more people means more production.

9. Do you feel that SM marketing could replace other more traditional ways of marketing (within the travel industry)?

Not necessarily, it depends so much on the market, for us it's perfect because our market is young and they all use social media all the time and obviously a company that sells orthopedic shoes for older people should not get rid of their traditional ways of marketing and start using Facebook because their clients don't probably have Facebook or use it and they probably watch a lot of TV so a TV commercial would be a lot better. So it depends on the market and in my view it never hurts to have a little bit of everything.

10. SM marketing helps create a new kind of word of mouth marketing, would you agree? (Customers can rate and discuss about the product more easily.)

Totally, yes. Tagging friends in events, seeing photos on Facebook, write reviews see comments, share an event on a friends page and. it's extremely dynamic and it reaches more people because of that.

11. Are you planning on developing the SM marketing even further? I.e. Twitter, Instagram, etc?

Yes, we are always trying to develop more. Right now I try to have at least one employee working on twitter and Instagram, they are not as important to me, but I feel like just the image of a company is a bit more complete when you have all the channels working in social media, if you only have Facebook it's not

as impressive as if you have twitter and Instagram. But at the moment for me it's a bit more for image and we don't focus that much on twitter or Instagram, because basically with Facebook it's easier to find clients directly. And yes I have the idea of developing. We want to set up a blog and have twitter and Instagram working nicely.

Extra question: Fear of people changing social media channels or people losing interest in SM completely? Or is it here to stay.

It's here to stay. I just think it's getting even more popular. And even with now you have to sign in with Facebook to basically everything.

And about social media generally: No it's not a fad. It's a new way of communication and here to stay.

12. Do you think that there is a fear that people would lose interest in social media completely, or is it here to stay?

It's here to stay. I just think it's getting even more popular. And even with now you have to sign in with Facebook to basically everything.

13. What about social media, is it a fad?

No, it's not a fad. It's a new way of communication and here to stay.

Interview questions and answers from interviewees B, C and D

Interviewee B

1. What do you think is the ratio between social media marketing and other types of marketing within the company?

We Love Spain practice social media marketing much more than any other types of marketing. The difference between those can be seen from the amount of people that work on social media marketing which consists of the entire team and the 4 out of 10 that are at least familiar with the other types of marketing the company practices. Taking in consideration this and the number of times we

do other types marketing I would say that the ratio is somewhere about one hundred to one.

2. Do you think that it was a deliberate choice for the company to use social media marketing as the main marketing tool?

Whether you're a large business or a lone entrepreneur social media marketing is one of the most inexpensive and powerful marketing tool in your intention to build the trust and authority. We Love Spain has its target group the young generation, most of them use social media every day, therefore, this is the platform they can be found on. So yes, in my opinion We Love Spain did not only choose social media marketing, it expanded the business over the entire Spain.

3. In what way could you prove that there is a concrete link with how much social media marketing you do with the company's sales? And in your opinion does this provide a way of measuring the profitability of social media marketing?

There is no 100% certainty in what is the number of clients that hear about us on social media, however, there are cities around Spain where we practice only social media marketing, that's the way we can link the sales with the marketing tool. Also, every time a customer is booking a trip with us they might answer the question: "Where have you heard about us"; also by using google analytics and so on.

The profitability of social media marketing is never a concrete number for our company, but there is an approximate one.

4. Do you feel that you are getting a return for your efforts when doing social media marketing? Also in a sense that the hours you put in aren't taking time away from your other tasks, or are the sales the most important thing?

That is the question I used to ask myself when only started doing social media marketing, and not much after I've got my answer: real social media marketing takes dedication and time, that is the one thing I'd need to worry when I'd get back to my work. And as it takes time my most important task is social media

marketing so I could get clients in order for my coworker, whose task is to organize trips, to do his job. If there is time left I am occupying it with other marketing tools.

5. In your opinion in what way can the company benefit the most from using social media marketing?

First of all, we increase the company's recognition. As there is two offices in Spain we need to use social media for the other cities. Once we get people to know about us, they start using our services, they keep on coming back to us and speak to other people about our events, therefore we also improve our loyalty. There is an opportunity that very few marketing tools offer, the possibility of a richer customer experience, it's much easier to publicly demonstrate our customer service level and heighten the relationship with our customers. If somebody leave a good review about us we can thank them publicly, otherwise we can immediately apologize and take actions. Then we can also gain valuable information about our customers that in the end can help us with promoting on social media. The last but one of the most important benefit is the marketing costs. Even paid advertising through Facebook or Twitter is relatively cheap.

6. Do you think it is absolutely necessary for We Love Spain to use social media marketing? Why?

At this point we are, in a way obligated to use social media in order to keep the business going with the same or at least with good success. As I mentioned above, the company has 2 offices, and it is possible to communicate to the other cities using different ways but there might be no profit in the end. Opening new offices involves a lot of investment as well.

Absolutely necessary...is not, it is a matter of choice.

7. Depending on the industry do you think it's necessary for other small and medium sized companies to use social media marketing?

If the company is grateful for the way it works and has no need for adding anything else, that is for the owner to decide, although I wouldn't see any reason not to use social media advertising, nowadays every single company, depending on the industry of course, can be found on Facebook/ Tweeter/ Pinteres etc. it can only raise your sales even if spending the least time possible for it.

8. In your opinion what is the future of social media marketing?

Many people would say that social media is at its limits and the only way it can go is down. I don't believe so. Wouldn't want to include all the markets in my answer, although it is quite the same. Talking about social media marketing for We Love Spain, I would say that it is going to get better and better as the workers experience increases and the number of students that go abroad as well. Even if at the moment there are so many fake companies on social media, the real ones will always find a way to gain its customers trust and loyalty. So... the future of social media marketing...I can only say that I could see myself doing this for my own company in 10 years.

Interviewee C

1. What do you think is the ratio between social media marketing and other types of marketing within the company?

Social media plays a big part in the company's marketing. It would never be the same without social media marketing, since it physically exists only in Seville and Huelva. All the other activities, such as posters, flyers, events etc. are together a great combo with social media, but it is definitely the biggest part (~80%?) of the company's marketing.

2. Do you think that it was a deliberate choice for the company to use social media marketing as the main marketing tool?

Yes I do think it was a choice made deliberately, social media marketing is cost effective, and with this kind of target group, which is young international stu-



dents spending a semester abroad in Spain, it is especially effective. Social media gives natural-looking visibility while it seems informative instead of too selly/annoying for the target group. The company can reach huge amounts of people with social media.

3. In what way could you prove that there is a concrete link with how much social media marketing you do with the company's sales? And in your opinion does this provide a way of measuring the profitability of social media marketing?

In my opinion there is a concrete link between the social media marketing and company sales. The company calculates the customers coming for certain geographic areas, and there can be seen certain changes during different semesters / years when changing something in the social media marketing. For example starting in a new geographic area will normally bring at least some customers from that area. Also, in the customer database we can see, that most of the clients have heard about the trip they bought from social media (Facebook), or through friends, who heard about it from social media.

The link is not always related to the actual amount of social media marketing made. It can also be linked to specific employees doing it. Since every target group in each city, and every city are a little bit different, you can never compare directly the amount of sales coming from a certain city. However, there might be noticeable differences between employees/interns doing promotion/social media marketing, and some are just better than others obviously. It doesn't have to be about the amount of social media marketing, it can be more about the way to do it in the most efficient way (not being too annoying or pushy, being as natural, real and believable as possible, finding the right people, "hitting their right spots" , being clever etc..)

4. Do you feel that you are getting a return for your efforts when doing social media marketing? Also in a sense that the hours you put in aren't taking time away from your other tasks, or are the sales the most important thing?

I have definitely felt that my effort to social media marketing has result in bigger sales in the specific areas I've been working with. I can also notice the times,

when I haven't had enough time to do the social media marketing, by not having as many customers from those areas. Sometimes, it requires more time and slowly working on the target group, "heating it up" a little bit, before you can see results, but many times there are also almost direct results that are most likely from the work you've done in social media. For example, doing promotion for a certain trip for a certain city on Facebook, and several bookings from that city the day after. There is always some luck involved obviously, since the buying actions are always made by different individuals.

5. In your opinion in what way can the company benefit the most from using social media marketing?

I think in the future the company could create even a more fixed system for promotion and social media marketing to benefit even more with the same effort. Since employees are making the effort to try to do great marketing, the company could use the same, good things in every city, making the social media marketing as a whole be more equal everywhere. I think this would also strengthen their brand even more. In theory, this would then mean that the everyday-work of an employee/intern could be divided more efficiently, spending less time with Facebook-posts without losing efficiency, but also spending more time with other tasks (social media related or other tasks). I think this is the direction where WLS is headed in the future, but it is not that easy since in this specific field the customers (and the interns!) tend to stay less than a year.

6. Do you think it is absolutely necessary for We Love Spain to use social media marketing? Why?

Yes I do. We have seen during several semesters how the social media marketing in WLS brings more customers from a larger geographic area, and builds knowledge of the company also in a larger area. Few years back there were customers mainly from Seville, and since the company started finding the people who fit their target group, but from other cities in Spain too, it has become very clear, that it works, and now a big part of clients are studying outside Seville.

Also, all of the company's "products" (trips, events) are very visual, and social media is a very useful channel for marketing with pictures and videos too.

7. Depending on the industry do you think it's necessary for other small and medium sized companies to use social media marketing?

Yes. Social media marketing is not only cheap, but it is the easiest way to reach people in their everyday lives. Nowadays it should be given, that every company has a some sort of page for the most relevant social medias for their needs. It is obviously more effective when used with other marketing means at the same time. It can be informative, while other means of marketing execute other types of communication, for example with some physical marketing in the "point of sales", campaigning etc, and then in social media letting people know about this. This way both parts support each other, so social media is not always so effective only by itself.

8. In your opinion what is the future of social media marketing?

I think its importance will continue growing in the near future, but also at some point it can become so typical (or has already become in some industries) that the companies who want to execute effective and interesting social media marketing will have to be clever in able to reach the right people and make them care. There will probably be a lot more "social media professionals" in the future, since it becomes a normal marketing mean to every company.

#### Interviewee D

1. What do you think is the ratio between social media marketing and other types of marketing within the company?

Our main marketing activities focus on social media marketing, we are improving that, but so far is a cheap, easy and fast way of marketing that has proven to give fast results.

2. Do you think that it was a deliberate choice for the company to use social media marketing as the main marketing tool?

Yes

3. In what way could you prove that there is a concrete link with how much social media marketing you do with the company's sales? And in your opinion does this provide a way of measuring the profitability of social media marketing?

When buying a trip and filling our online form one of the questions we ask our costumers is where did you hear about the trip? Most of them answer something related to social media. And I think not every bussines could profit the same from social media marketing, but our target social group focus on young students traveling abroad from their home, so a group of people that spends a lot of time a day in social media.

4. Do you feel that you are getting a return for your efforts when doing social media marketing? Also in a sense that the hours you put in aren't taking time away from your other tasks, or are the sales the most important thing?

Sales are one of our main priorities, and the time we invest in doing social media marketing does pay off. But some times I do feel that there are other important task that are "left behind" because of spending more time in promoting. But we are starting to change that!

5. In your opinion in what way can the company benefit the most from using social media marketing?

Spreading the word about our company, selling, showing our services...

6. Do you think it is absolutely necessary for We Love Spain to use social media marketing? Why?

Yes, because we know for a fact that the more social marketing we do, the more sales we have and the more costumers.

7. Depending on the industry do you think it's necessary for other small and medium sized companies to use social media marketing?

I think nowadays it's just like 10 years ago to have a website, was not entirely necessary, but it helped! Social media is just a new step into the internet marketing.

8. In your opinion what is the future of social media marketing?

Just my personal opinion, but I think people will loose interest in the social media at some point (when something new is created?...) and then we will have to reinvent the media marketing, nothing stays still, everything evolves!